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ABSTRACT

The five articles contained in this journal issue deal with basic/survival reading skills. Specific topics covered in the articles are an overview of survival reading, the reading habits of college students, a principal's view of reading instruction, a healthy self-concept as a basic survival skill, and a readability rating list for teacher-made materials. Regular journal features include a research update on accountability and the basics, a list of survival skills materials for use by teachers, reviews of professional materials, and a discussion of the role of parents in child language development. (FL)

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Dear Colleagues,

I received this letter during the summer and saved it so that its contents could be shared with you.

The letter comes from a retiring reading teacher. It reads as follows:

> "I want to thank you for all the wonderful articles in your journals, the tremendous speakers at your conventions, and the big boost your organization has given reading in Wisconsin."

It is rewarding to know that the WSRA has been a source of professional enrichment and enjoyment to this retiring colleague. I hope that with our reduced membership rate for retired teachers, we can encourage their continued membership and participation in the WSRA.

Russ Burgett
President

Survival Reading: An Overview Of What, Why, and How

by

Jennifer A. Stevenson
Lecturer
University of Wisconsin--Madison

Survival reading--what is it, and why the current national interest? This article will suggest answers to these questions, as well as describe some materials, activities and basic principles which may be useful starting points for teaching survival reading.

"Survival reading" is often used interchangeably with the terms "functional reading" or "functional literacy." The most commonly-accepted definition of these terms is one recently discussed at length by Kirsch and Guthrie (1977-78). According to this definition, survival reading is the ability to read and understand those materials which are directly related to everyday living, materials which one must read to "function" or "survive" in our society. This is not a new kind of reading, of course, but one which has recently received new emphasis. There is another aspect to some definitions of survival reading: the use of real-life or functional materials to teach the usual basic reading skills. Schedules, menus, maps and the like are often more relevant, interesting, and motivating to students than traditional materials, and are now being used more frequently in teaching all kinds of reading. A reasonable definition of survival reading, then, has two parts: 1) the goal of competent reading of functional, daily-living materials, and 2) the technique of using daily-living materials to teach both survival and more-traditional kinds of reading.

That there has recently been an increased interest in functional reading is clear. Witness many

journal articles (see references), conference programs, elementary and high schools' definitions of minimum competencies for graduation (Vance, 1976), many new commercially-produced materials (see below), the development of assessment instruments in this area (Lichtman, 1974; Maryland State Department of Education, 1975), and the discussions of the International Reading Association (Eller, 1978).

Why this recent interest in functional literacy? There is a growing concern, perhaps justified, perhaps not, that today's students are less able readers than their counterparts of 20 or so years ago. Tuinman, Rowls and Farr (1976) and Farr (1978) propose that, for the average or above-average student, this concern is probably not justified, and is certainly not empirically defensible. However, it is true that more of the less-academically-inclined students remain in elementary and high schools longer today than in former years, and that more of these students go on to college. This fact may cause the worrisome, slight overall decline in test scores; and, it is certainly causing educators to re-examine curricula in order to assure that all students who graduate are at least "minimally competent."

What does it mean to be a competent "survival" reader in our society? What are the important, definable, separable subparts of this broad goal? At what grade levels should particular identified subskills be attained? How can the parts or the whole be measured? Many educators are looking for or proposing tentative answers to these questions (Lichtman 1974; Maryland State Department of Education, 1975; Vance, 1976; Ayrer, 1977; Gilman, 1977; Powell, 1977; Eller, 1978; McClung, 1978), but there are certainly no definitive answers at the moment. Therefore, although these are intriguing and important questions, the remainder of this article will focus elsewhere. What is available, at this point, are materials, activities and general principles with which one can begin to teach some apparently-needed and logically-defensible survival reading skills.

Materials for teaching survival reading abound. Newspapers, menus, phone books, catalogues, maps, schedules, application forms, bank forms, food containers, TV guides, travel brochures, camping, fishing, and hunting regulations (Department of Natural Resources) and similar materials are available to

teachers free of charge. Other materials are available commercially, such as those listed below.

1. The Survival Reading Series by Irene Reiter (Cambridge Book Company, 488 Madison Avenue, New York, 10022) contains a fairly-comprehensive list of ideas for using free materials, as well as excellent activities for teaching.

2. The Survival Reading Series and Be Informed Series (New Readers Press, Box 131, Syracuse, New York 13210) are two collections of inexpensive, high-interest-low-vocabulary booklets on topics such as "Read the Instructions First", "Label Talk" or "Be Informed on Drugs."

3. Survival Learning Materials: Suggestions for Development by Robert M. Wilson and Marcia M. Barnes (College Reading Association: Strine Publishing Company, York, Pennsylvania, 1974) is an inexpensive booklet containing ideas for constructing learning centers.

4. Many newspapers publish idea and activity booklets for learning to read the newspaper. Several of these are the Chicago Tribune's Innovate Worktext and the Milwaukee Journal's a) Newspaper in the Classroom: A Dozen Introductory Activities for Elementary Grades, b) Using the Newspaper to Developing Reading Skills in Middle Grades, c) Newspaper in Education: Middle School, 656 Activities for Grades 6-8.

5. Kaye Furlong's Study Skills Cards (Frank Schaffer, 26616 Indian Peak Road, Palos Verdes Peninsula, California 90274) contains some activities for reading materials such as a phone book, a TV guide or classified ads.

6. The Supermarket Recall Program (William Orr, Dept. M. 111 Roe Blvd. East, Patchoque, New York 11772) is an interesting but somewhat-expensive program for developing comprehension skills using grocery labels.

7. The "McMenemy Functional Literacy List" of functional vocabulary, arranged from primer through sixth grade, can be found in Otto, McMenemy and Smith's Corrective and Remedial Teaching (1974, 189-198).

What about activities? Many activity suggestions can be found in some of the sources just noted. Reis (1977) and Mattleman and Blake (1977) also suggest some starting points. The following are some additional ideas:

1. Use cereal boxes for comparison-and-contrast activities. Determine relative cost, nutrients or additives. Analyze the sales appeal. Have students create new cereals and construct posters to advertise their products

2. Obtain a class set of carry-out menus from a local pizzaria (or any other restaurant). Construct questions and activities to develop different levels of comprehension. Questions can range from "What are the most expensive items on the menu?" to "How much would it cost to order a small pizza with sausage, onion and black olives?" to "If you had $3.00 to spend, what would you buy and how much change should you receive?"

3. Have a newspaper scavenger hunt. Each student or team might be asked to find items such as: a) the last square of the Peanuts comic strip, b) two want ads where math is important for finding a job, c) a news story about your home town, d) a sports story about your favorite team, e) your horoscope for the day, f) the best bargain for eating dinner in a restaurant.

Such lists can go on and on, but, rather than continuing here, it seems important to consider some basic principles which are particularly important when teaching survival reading. These ideas are not new. They are, rather, reminders of some tried-and-true techniques which are especially worth noting in this area.

1. Whenever possible, use real materials and situations. A real label on a real aspirin bottle

is far better material for learning than a picture on a worksheet. A real reading-and-following-a-map expedition is better than a simulated one. Obviously, real situations are not always possible; but consider using activities such as role playing to augment reading or discussion.

2. Include readiness assessment in the teaching plan. Frequent conversations with students about their interests and needs will help you determine what materials and activities would be appropriate. Students may have far more (or less) knowledge of, for example, reading a catalogue than one thinks.

3. Include readiness activities in the teaching plan. Before beginning, for example, to read and follow the directions for baking cookies, preview the materials and activities with the students. Prepare them for successful completion of the task. Solicit from them their present knowledge and previous experience, then augment that as needed before asking them to do the task.

4. For a task other than a reinforcement activity, <u>teach</u> students how to do what is being asked. Be wary of testing in the guise of teaching, which may occur whenever students are asked to give a final performance without previous teacher modeling or guidance. Students who are asked, for example, to compare the schedules of two different bus lines may not be able to do so without being previously taught to read schedules, to make comparisons, and to combine the two tasks.

5. And, finally, be sure to develop higher- as well as lower-level comprehension skills. It is vital that students learn how to apply and transfer their in-class functional reading skills to future, out-of-class, real-life, survival situations.

These thoughts on survival reading--a brief "what, why and how"--include, in closing, a note of caution. Unquestionably, it is important that schools assure all students of <u>at least</u> functional literacy. However, we must remember that this is a "minimum" goal; we must be careful that we do not relegate students to survival only.

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A Definition of Competency-Based Education

"Competency-based education (is) a data-based, adaptive, performance-oriented set of integrated processes that facilitate, measure, record and certify within the context of flexible time parameters the demonstration of known, explicitly stated and agreed upon learning outcomes that reflect successful functioning in life roles."

Quoted from Education U.S.A. Vol. 20, No. 35, May 1, 1978, page 265.

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Are College Students Reading?

by

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Recent critics of education cite both fact and opinion to support the belief that our population is not reading for pleasure. On the other hand, publishers claim to be selling more books, magazines, and newspapers than ever. Are people reading or what is happening to this outpouring of print media? For reading teachers this question should be especially pressing.

In the past few years students at both average and below average college reading levels have been telling instructors at the University Reading--Study Center that they strongly dislike reading. They often claim that they don't read for pleasure or personal growth. They seem to expect the staff to give them a magic formula for changing attitudes. What a challenge to a teacher!

But is the situation as bad as it appears? To answer this question a survey was made of freshman in English composition classes. This group was selected because it is representative of a cross section of abilities and academic interests. Students were asked questions regarding attitude toward reading, perception of their ability, in addition to their reading habits and interests.

Of the 492 students surveyed, 59.3% stated that they enjoyed reading, 11.6% claimed to dislike reading, and the remainder indicated neutral feelings. These results were heartening in view of the previous negative input from students. However, the neutral and negative numbers were larger than reading teachers want to find.

Why do students feel as they do about reading? The students who expressed positive feelings about

reading indicated a variety of influences. The availability of interesting reading materials was a factor checked by 75% of this group. "My abilities in reading" was indicated by 65%. Also receiving mention by over 50% of these students were both teachers' and parents' influence. Certainly this is not saying anything startling but reinforces the conventional wisdom that sigrificant others shape attitudes toward reading.

As might be predicted, students indicating dislike for reading did not strongly indicate any influences. About one third mentioned as factors in determining attitudes; teacher influence, method of reading instruction, and their own abilities. Parental influence was checked by only 21.5% of these students. It is difficult to know if they meant the influences were positive or negative. Friends' attitudes were minor factors to both those who enjoyed reading and those who disliked it.

What were the reading habits of these college students? The responses were encouraging in light of the large amount of reading demanded by class work. When asked the number of unassigned books read in the past year, the following responses were given: 21% read more than 10 books, 17.4% read 7-10 books, 45.3% read 2-6 books, and about 1% read 1 or none.

In response to the question, "What do I enjoy reading?" the range of responses was wide. Science fiction books were named by 42%, mysteries by 52.2% and other types of novels by 60%. Biography was listed by 43% and other nonfiction was named by 47%. The Hobbit Trilogy and Hesse's Siddhartha were the most frequent responses when students were asked to name the most interesting book read. In all, 158 books were named, covering a wide range from Charlotte's Web to Candide, from the Exorcist to the Bible. Although the literature teacher may not completely approve of the choices, it appeared these freshman were reading. Also they were reading the same books as the book buying public because a large number of books named were on the current list of best selling paperbacks.

More favored than books were newspapers and magazines. Of the total group surveyed 68% said they enjoyed reading newspapers. Claiming to read newspapers at least twice a week were 68.6% of the

students. This was a large number considering the students lived in the residence halls with little access to newspapers.

The following magazine reading habits were reported: 5 or more magazines per month were read by 18%, 2-4 magazines were read by 36.9%, 1-2 magazines were read per month by 38.2% and 6.7% read none. Sports Illustrated and Newsweek were named as favorites by more students than any other magazines. The sixty-three different magazines mentioned covered a wide range of interests.

Students who claimed dislike and neutral feelings toward reading strongly favored newspapers and magazines, 68% and 78.5% respectively, but only about one third of these students indicated interest in fiction or nonfiction books.

Thus, it appears that students are reading more than was believed but not the quantity and quality teachers desire. Reading teachers and high school literature teachers hope to inspire their students to be avid readers of "worthwhile" books. About 10 years ago The Wisconsin Teachers of English compiled a reading list for the college bound based on a survey of 146 college teachers in Wisconsin. In this list only seven books were agreed on by half the surveyed teachers. They included in order of agreement: Huckleberry Finn, The Bible, Homer's Illiad, David Copperfield, Bullfinche's Mythology, Gulliver's Travels, Odyssey, Tom Sawyer, Robinson Crusoe, Alice in Wonderland, Treasure Island, Grapes of Wrath, and Walden. The teachers in this survey were mostly literature teachers. It is not probable that a group of truly interdisciplinary instructors would agree on a reading list; however, they expect a broad base of knowledge of world history and current events. In addition, reading fact and fiction about life in other times and places gives the student a broader understanding of life and himself. Many college lecturers and textbook authors use--literally or metaphorically--names of characters, of places from Greek or Roman myths, the Bible, Shakespeare, and other literary classics. Extensive general and technical vocabularies are demanded and can be obtained by wide reading. This broad base of knowledge is a powerful magnet that draws to it any related information making the new ideas and facts easier to grasp and retain, thus, making studying easier.

Many skills that develop with wide reading are assumed by college professors. The most basic assumption is that the student is an independent learner who studies assigned material in the manner necessary to master it without supervision. Not only must the student comprehend the literal meaning (main idea, supporting detail, etc.) but be able to assimilate this new knowledge into the larger body of previously learned material. Although faculty members give some study tips it is usually expected that the student has mastered techniques for reading and studying abstract material written in styles other than narrative. Also it is assumed that the student is a fluent flexible reader who can keep pace with the weekly assignments. True some of these skills take a lifetime to perfect and maintain but the student needs to have read widely in order to have these at the level instructors expect.

The findings of the survey have some implications for teachers and parents of elementary and secondary school students. Books and other reading material must be made available constantly instead of just on library day. Newspapers and magazines should be at hand to tempt the students to browse and read. Magazines will be used if they are available in the classroom or areas where students spend free time. Parents also must try to make reading materials available at home.

Given the popularity of newspapers and magazines it seems that they might be used frequently in the classroom for both their motivational and educational value. As many recent journal articles have stated, almost all reading skills can be taught through these high interest materials. Because these materials are so influential and widely read, critical reading techniques need to be taught for students to be intelligent consumers of these media.

The influence of the parent and teacher, mentioned by over 50% of the enthusiastic readers, is often underestimated. Do parents and teachers take time to talk about enjoyable reading experiences? How many share interesting scenes from novels and short stories or casually refer to books, newspapers, or magazines being read? Do parents and teachers let students know that reading is a vital part of adult life?

The survey seems to indicate that teachers and parents have been effective in interesting a number of students to read. But it also suggests that there exists the potential to bring about attitude change in other students by using materials that are acceptable to them.

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Membership Committee Reports

More teachers would join a local reading council or the state association if they knew about them. So as members, it is up to us to get the word out.

Invite a friend to join the WSRA with you. Tell your friend about the two conferences each year for professional growth. How exciting it is to talk to other educators and learn what they are doing. Tell your friends they will meet people from all over the state with common interests when they attend reading conferences.

Don't forget about the four issues of the WSRA JOURNAL, the newsletter, and updates on state legislation concerning reading. The Journals are expecially helpful with ideas that can be used in the classroom. The Journals also contain articles on the latest trends in reading.

You may want to mention the purposes of WSRA to your friends. WSRA serves the reading interests of Wisconsin through investigations in reading, conferences for professional improvement, and legislative action for reading improvement. WSRA encourages the formation of local councils and helps them in every way possible. WSRA also maintains communication and involvement with the State Department of Public Instruction, the Right To Read Effort, and other agencies that are interested in reading.

Renew your membership immediately and give the centerfold membership form to a friend right away.

WSRA Membership Committee

A Principal Looks at Reading

by

Joanne Yatvin, Principal
Crestwood Elementary School
Madison, Wisconsin

Although I don't usually remember or quote aphorisms, I am haunted by one that John Holt offered in How Children Fail: "If we taught children to speak, they'd never learn." Watching children struggle with the flashcards, workbooks, and other paraphernalia of reading instruction I can't help thinking that we have trapped them in a forest of systems, diagnoses, and prescriptions that is effectively keeping many of them from seeing the trees--that is, from reading.

Of all the things we expect children to learn in school, reading has the most natural motivating power because it is both an inherently useful and an inherently pleasurable activity. And this fact--unlike similar ones about sex and drinking--is not an adult secret. It is quite apparent to non-reading 4, 5, and 6 year olds that the rest of the world is reading and getting a lot of benefits from it that they aren't getting.

What is more, learning to read is easy, certainly a great deal easier than learning the grammar of one's native language, which almost all children have done by the time they enter school. It is just a matter of cracking a 26 symbol code, which corresponds to the oral language system children already know, aided by picture clues, the human ability to predict the future from past experience, repetition that is characteristic of children's literature and familiarity with the patterns of our language. For kids who can crack Batman's secret code, recognize McDonald's signs, recite nursery rhymes, figure out what Mom and Dad are spelling at the dinner table, retell an entire episode of "Six Million Dollar Man," and put together a jigsaw puzzle in 30 seconds,

reading should be a cinch. Why isn't it? Why are the schools unable to turn so much natural motivation and learning ability into reading competence?

Because schools concentrate their efforts on formal reading instruction that works against natural aptitude and desire and makes drudgery out of ease. Formal instruction turns kids off to reading by taking the enjoyment, the adventure; and the usefulness out of it. First we put most of the books that are fun out of reach on library shelves for "later on when you can read," replacing them with basals that place more value on controlled vocabulary than on capturing the interest of children. Then we regiment the reading process so that learning is allowed only in a prescribed and measured sequence. And finally we restrict classroom reading to text materials by barring most real forms of print, such as comic books, cereal boxes and advertisements.

When occasionally, the real print world does intrude on this sheltered classroom, the teacher stands as the literate intermediary, translating, explaining, and interpreting so that children do not have to face this real need to read.

Formal instruction turns ease into drudgery through reading tasks that are dull, meaningless and painful. By extracting so-called "decoding skills" from the reading process we divert children from reading real stories and messages to working out silly puzzles with letters, syllables, and words. "Write in the missing letters in the words below so that each one rhymes with 'game.'" We make them interrupt their understanding of a story to sound-out unfamiliar words that often remain unfamiliar after the sounding-out. We ask questions about symbols, not about stories. "Which word in that sentence begins with a consonant blend?" We expect them to decode a page of print on which they can recognize instantly only a fraction of the words. We have them practice identifying words on flash-cards that have no context to clue in meaning: "Is it rēd or red?" We give them rules to memorize that don't hold true: "When two vowels go walking, the first one does the talking." (How ironic that the only word in this rule that has two vowels together--"does"--is an exception) And worst of all we make them sit in a circle for 30 minutes everyday and listen to other children struggling and stumbling

as they try to read aloud. With all of the rigamarole of reading instruction teachers forget--and many children never discover--that the printed page is supposed to make sense!

Does reading have to be this way? A thousand times NO! We could so easily fill the classrooms with books, signs and messages that make sense and let children know that we expect them to read them--if not immediately, in time. We could read and read and read aloud to children, letting them look at the printed page as we do, and repeating favorite stories, until they have memorized the text and can "read" along. We could choose stories that have repetition in plot and language so that children can predict what comes next. We could pair off each non-reading child with a reading child to "teach" him or her. We could make wonderful story books from collected comic strips. We could learn songs, poems, and plays from printed sheets. We could write down children's own stories for them and with them, and have them read the stories back. We could give children cards with their own chosen words to learn and keep. We could write messages to each individual child and expect him or her to write to us, their classmates, and their parents.

All these strategies and many more are available to teachers for nurturing children's natural desire and aptitude for reading. The creation of such a reading environment is all that many children need to start reading. For others supportive instruction may be necessary. But that instruction, when given should complement meaningful learning, not work against it.

Guest Editorial

THE MOST BASIC SURVIVAL SKILL: A HEALTHY SELF-CONCEPT

by

Carole Mauloff
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"The absolute truth is that I am a thoroughly wonderful person."

"I can do so much more than even I sometimes realize."

I don't need to wait until I am able to do something perfectly to try it."

"I just give it my best effort and make improvements as they are needed."

"I am always on the lookout for what is good in myself and others."

"I don't let fears control my life."

"I know how to set goals for myself and how to see the various alternatives available to me in attaining these goals."

What type of student would make these statements in today's classrooms? One who possessed the most basic survival skill of all--A HEALTHY SELF-CONCEPT! Why is it, then, that these statements are very seldom heard in our schools, much less in our remedial reading classes? Or should it be asked, what can

reading specialists do to promote these healthy attitudes in their students?

Too often the comments are heard, "What can I do for this student? He thought he was a failure when he came into my classroom. I can't undo the years of failures he has had. He's 13 and he still reads at a 3rd grade level. His parents don't care. Anything I might do will be undone by the home situation. Anyway, my job is to teach him how to read not to be his counselor."

Yes, the reading specialist's responsibility is to teach the subject area; however, if the teacher realizes that each person learns and achieves in direct correlation with his or her self image, then a slightly different emphasis is needed in the classroom. Certainly it is easy to recognize the lack of self-confidence in the "under-achiever" in the classroom. What can be done to help?

At the beginning of each school year the reading specialist should spend a few days setting a classroom climate that will enhance not only learning but also personal growth for each student. A climate that will allow a student to realize his worth and value. A climate that will encourage each student to concentrate on the good qualities he possesses and to search for the same in others. A climate that will allow a student to overcome his various fears. A climate that will allow each student to see risks as an avenue for growth. A climate that will allow each student to set goals for himself and to choose from among the numerous options available to him in attaining these goals. A climate that will foster positive attitudes and statements such as "I <u>can</u> do it" and "I <u>can</u> learn how".

How does the reading specialist go about fostering this climate in the classroom? First, it might be helpful to take an inventory of his or her own self-concept. This will better enable the reading specialist to recognize the same healthy and unhealthy attitudes in the classroom. The following questions will aid in this task. How do I view myself? Am I self-affirming or self-denying? Am I more concerned with being liked by others than being myself? Do I deny my gifts and talents or am I performing to my fullest potential? Do I view the world with trust or skepticism? Am I pleased with my intellectual ability or do I feel inferior when

surrounded by my peers? Do I value myself and others or is my usual statement a "put down"? Do I set goals for myself or do I "float" through life wondering why I never accomplish what I dream about? Am I open and flexible when confronted with ideas different from mine or am I rigid and unbending? Do I use informational criticism which shows people a better way of doing something without devaluing them or do I use destructive criticism which criticizes the person?

Secondly, the reading specialist can become better acquainted with the relevant materials that are being published. Books such as 100 Ways to Improve Self-Concept in the Classroom; Fully Human, Fully Alive; The Power of Your Subconscious Mind; You Can If You Think You Can; The Power of Positive Thinking; Self-Love: The Dynamic Force of Success; and The Success Principle. Each of these books contains numerous valuable ideas for improving self-concept.

After the reading specialist has inventoried his/her self-concept, has read widely of the literature available, and has begun to share these ideas and practices with students, it is possible to anticipate many wonderful outcomes! Hopefully each student will have 1) a greater respect for and love of self and others; 2) greater confidence in performing worthwhile tasks; 3) the ability to determine priorities or goals in life and know how to achieve them; 4) the valuable quality of positive thinking; and 5) the ability to laugh at mistakes, learn from them, and move on. Most importantly, the student will view himself as an important, whorthwhile, valuable, and even sacred member of humanity. When an individual has learned to make the most of these talents and abilities, then "survival" in reading and in every classroom will be possible.

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A Readability Rating List For Teacher Made Materials

by

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Jill skipped into the room on time for her 3:45 appointment with the reading specialist, tossed her backpack onto the table, and then slouched into the chair. It was easy to see that she was ready to do something, but not her homework.

"I hate you," she says with a sly grin.

"I know it," the reading specialist quips. "We hate each other. That's why we get along so well together. I'm the teacher, you're the student. That makes us natural enemies, doesn't it?"

"Yeah, I hate you," Jill shouts. "You belong in the morgue with all the other dead people!" She smiles with pride at having come up with a metaphor of her own.

"Well, maybe I do," returns the reading specialist, "but I'm not there yet; and I'm going to haunt you when I do go. You'll have nightmares of nothing but the worst of homework, and none of it ever finished on time."

She sticks out her tongue and laughs at the fun of getting away with releasing her pent-up tensions the way she does when she's here with the reading specialist. They have a good time together.

"All right, what needs to be worked on tonight? Let's get at it so we'll be done on time."

"History...Blah!"

"Where are the instructions? Can I see them?" The reading specialist is trying to establish a business-like mood for the session.

"Here, students, read about the Northwest Passage and finish all the questions on this sheet I'm handing out," she mimics her social studies teacher. She hands the instruction sheet to the reading specialist and begins reading from her book.

Jill is not a poor student. As a matter of fact, her grades are all A's and B's. Her mother wants her to get more help, however, because she feels there is not enough concern for the basics in the public school Jill attends.

The reading specialist has noticed one possible problem for Jill, and that is in the area of comprehension. Sometimes she has trouble answering a question that requires her to make an inference about a reading selection. But this is not really serious, and, for Jill, improvement may have more to do with her growing up in the world than with her slaving away over lessons designed to develop reading comprehension ability. So, the reading specialist devotes most of his time to guiding Jill through her homework assignments. When he observes that she fails to answer a question correctly, he determines the reason for her error and explains how the correct answer can be derived.

As the reading specialist looks over the handout from Jill's social studies teacher, he suddenly realizes that now he too has a problem. Today the handout could prevent Jill from comprehending her reading assignment. The sheet has uneven, faded blue type in single space from half-inch margin to half-inch margin, top to bottom. The type is much smaller than that used in her text. Also, three, four, and five part questions all run together; they are not listed.

The reading specialist can get through this handout all right, but it requires slower reading than should be called for and may even require checking off lines to be certain of keeping his place as he goes down the page. Apparently this handout was run off and passed out to all of the students in

Jill's class. Not many of them have the kind of personal attention Jill is receiving. This makes the reading specialist wonder: Is there something I could do to help our teachers improve the readability of their handout materials?

Every teacher at one time or another has, in haste, run off a handout that's fallen far short of what the students needed to guide their thoughts in relation to reading. Looking at it some years later, that same teacher might not even recognize it as his or her own work.

But why wait so long? The writer gave some thought to what the worst of handouts he had received as a student looked like. He also reviewed some he himself had prepared in haste. Then he recalled a number of other instances when, as a reading specialist, he discovered that the real problem for a disadvantaged reader was the handout the teacher was using. He wrote these problems down as objective criteria and then attached them to a rating scale of good, fair, and poor.

A Readability Rating List for Teacher Made Materials

	Poor	Fair	Good
1. The print is sharp, clear, and bold in contrast to the color of the page.	1	2	3
2. The lines from left to right are even.	1	2	3
3. The size of the type is appropriate for the intended age group.	1	2	3
4. The length of the line of type is suitable for the intended age group.	1	2	3
5. The print is properly spaced on the page to make it visually appealing and not discouraging.	1	2	3
6. The illustrations are clearly reproduced.	1	2	3

	Poor	Fair	Good
7. The instructions are simple enough to enable all students to work independently.	1	2	3
8. The choice of words correctly conveys the intended message.	1	2	3
9. The sentences are structurally correct (e.g. grammar and punctuation).	1	2	3
10. New or difficult vocabulary is introduced to the students by highlighting, italics, or definition in context.	1	2	3
11. The handout focuses on a minimum amount of skills or concepts.	1	2	3
12. The copyrighted material is not outdated in terms of			
a. accuracy	1	2	3
b. language usage	1	2	3
13. Considering the purpose and content of the lesson, this handout is a valuable supplement to the instruction.	1	2	3
14. Are there any spelling mistakes?	yes		no

Curious as to the usefulness of this rating list and wondering about the kinds of reactions it would elicit from teachers, the writer met privately with a number of teachers and asked each for help. As might be expected, some of the teachers were put on the defensive. They wanted to know if any of their students had complained about the handouts used in their classes. He quickly assured them that there was no such reason for his contacting them, and that he was simply asking for their help to determine the usefulness of this rating list for teachers in their school district. After using this rating list to evaluate at least one of their handouts, he explained, they were to comment on the level of awareness it

gave them regarding the handouts they use in their classes.

The writer was pleasantly surprised at the positive responses he received from these teachers and even had the pleasure of seeing some improvements made just as a result of the survey.

The following is typical of the comments received. "This rating list forced me to deal with something I'm regularly involved with as a teacher. Now I am more aware of the problem. I know, for example, that I was using one handout that was over the heads of my students. I have decided to use that handout more carefully in the future, and I'm looking for alternative means of attaining the same ends for my students."

Other helpful suggestions were that this rating list be posted by the ditto machines, that it be used as an interdepartmental check of the quality of the handouts, and that students use it to rate a teacher's handouts.

One teacher remarked that after studying the rating list she recalled that one of her handouts always seemed to give students problems. She had assumed that they were just not getting the point of the lesson, but after locating the handout in her file and giving it a close study, she discovered that her arrangement of the words the students were to choose from would be much simpler in columns, rather than in lines.

Other teachers mentioned that perhaps the small type on some of their handouts was really standing in the way of learning for students. It would be especially bad, for example, to use such handouts with poor readers.

A few days after getting the results from the survey, the writer happened to be present when one of the school aides was retyping handouts for the teacher who'd told him she was having a number of her handouts upgraded. "Look at this," the aide said. "I'm typing it over so that it isn't so blurred and so squeezed together, and I'm having trouble reading it myself. Maybe it will take more than one page now, but at least they can read it."

It would be worse than naive to believe that a general house cleaning will follow in any district simply because this list is available. What can happen, though, is that the rating list can be given to teachers who are looking for help. If they are conscientious, they will examine their personal collections of handouts, find the poor ones, and decide either to revise them at once or send masters and all to the shredder. Also, reading specialists can make the check list available to new teachers and to student teachers, so that they, too, will have some guidelines for meeting the expectations and needs of their supervisors and students. Finally, the checklist could be the subject of discussion and follow-up at an inservice or a department meeting where teachers could be reminded of the importance of the little things they can do to make their students' work less burdensome.

RESEARCH UPDATE:

Accountability and the Basics

by

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In England, during the period of 1851 to 1858, the public grants to educate rose from 265,500 pounds to 973,950. At the same time the Crimean War had cost England about 78 million pounds. In order to cut the costs of education the Newcastle Report of 1858 recommended that funds be granted only to schools where average attendance reached 140 days per year, and where children attained a certain degree of knowledge as ascertained by examiners. According to Small (1972) the report went on to say, "The examination will exercise a powerful influence over the efficiency of the schools. Everyone who has been at a public school knows how searching and improving is the character of a careful examination." Items on the test which was developed included these: "Children had to write correctly from dictation: 'If you twist that stick so long you will make your wrist ache.' And they had to solve the following arithmetical problem: 'Five and one half yards make one pole. Draw a diagram to show that 30¼ square yards make one perch.'"

By 1865 the examinations had succeeeded in reducing government expenditures to 76,000 pounds, a savings of almost 900,000 pounds, but education was in a shambles. Since jobs were dependent upon the number of "passes" teachers taught only to the test, thereby lowering the quality of education to the minimum needed to pass. In 1868, J. Kay-Shuttleworth, an educational critic, said, "The Revised Code has constructed nothing; it has only pulled down. It has not simplified the administration...it has disorganized the whole system. It has not succeeded in being efficient: for it wastes the public money without

producing the results which were declared to be its main object."

There is currently a great deal of frustration at the level of performance of our nation's graduating high school seniors. In the past ten years the amount of money spent on education has skyrocketed, especially at the state and federal level. Meanwhile the nation has gone through an expensive and defeating war in Vietnam that has forced us to re-examine our priorities.

According to Hawthorne (1975) thirty-one states have some kind of comprehensive accountability legislation, and two others have joint resolutions which are implemented as if they were law. The remaining states do not have accountability laws, but all fifty states have state board policies related to accountability. Among other accountability measures, forty states have developed statewide learner objectives for the students in their schools, and thirty-six states have state mandated program evaluations for local school districts. Twenty-five states have legislated comprehensive planning for school districts, twenty-two have demanded program planning and budgeting systems (PPBS), while eighteen have legislated management by behavioral objectives (MBO), eleven have a management information system to coordinate the information that school districts receive, twenty have a unified accounting system, and seven have school accreditation based partly on school performance. In other words, accountability is now the law of the land.

Although legislators hope that their accountability measures will bring about improved education for the students, the main thing they seem to accomplish is to increase the amount of paperwork on the part of local school districts, and to increase the amount of information that the lawmakers have about the schools. They know better where their money is going but they see little in the form of real gain on the part of students as a result of their efforts.

The Michigan Accountability system offers a case in point. Originally it was praised as a way to begin a "quiet revolution" (Porter, 1972) where "emphasis will shift from teaching to learning, and that quality will be less a function of input and more a function of output or results--observable

changes in the learners' performance." The model of accountability that was developed contained six basic steps: "(1) the identification of common goals; (2) the development of performance objectives; (3) the assessment of needs; (4) the analysis of delivery systems; (5) the evaluation of programs; and (6) recommendations for improvement." Again using the terminology of industry, Porter goes on to say that the model "will permit us to apply realistic quality control at all educational levels in order to assure a product that will have the opportunity, the basic skills, and the will and desire to become a contributing member of our society rather than a reluctant welfare recipient."

Two years later House, Rivers and Stufflebeam (1974), a study team commissioned by the Michigan Education Association and the National Education Association (NEA), found problems with all six steps of the plan. They found the goals were too vague, the objectives limited to the cognitive domain, and not representing a true consensus of Michigan's educators. They also found that the objectives were not, in fact, minimal, but that very few students could meet all of them. In one district over 50% failed. The assessment component was a complete failure, providing assessment only in mathematics and reading at two grade levels. Schools were ranked on the basis of norm-referenced tests at first, and the results were sensationalized in the press. Later, criterion-referenced tests were put into full-scale use without being validated. In the analysis of delivery systems the study team found serious fault with the provision that tied money in the form of compensatory aid to pupils' test scores in each district. In addition to the absurd problem of withholding funds from the districts which obviously need them the most, the study team found money being given or withheld on the basis of possible measurement error. They found no evidence that such rewards produced any gains among the disadvantaged students.

The study quotes one concerned state official as saying, "Sometimes I wake up at night worried about the direction we're going. It's like a giant snowball rolling downhill." Teachers and teacher groups opposed the program as being limiting to school programs, and hastily thought through.

In their reply, Kearney, Donovan, and Fisher (1974) defended the program, admitting that there

were some flaws, especially where haste was necessary. More recently some major revisions have been made in Michigan's accountability program (Hawthorne, 1975), especially in the area of testing, where a more comprehensive competency-based evaluation is being developed. The system of rewards for high reading scores was dropped when it turned out that Detroit would be the main school system to be penalized. It is possible to speculate that the reason that Michigan was not one of the first states to consider minimum competencies is that they got "burned" on accountability.

Attempting to mold the educational establishment into the industrial model has not been easy, and it has not met everywhere with success. But the attempt is being made, and usually by legislators and state boards of education which carry a big stick, or at least a big carrot, in the form of money. Educators who narrowly plow their own little corner of the cornfield may suddenly find that the owner sold the farm to a big agribusiness conglomerate. In short, educators may find that individual teaching styles, or innovations in curricula may be impossible to carry on in the face of state mandated goals, objectives, curricula, tests, and even management systems.

Legislators do not like to give away the taxpayers' money without getting something in return. In the past, that something has usually been a big stack of reports, but little in the way of real pupil progress. Needless to say, as their investment grows, and as older, less direct systems fail to produce results, legislators will search for new magic solutions. It is small wonder they are now turning to minimum competency standards, where the burden of accountability is on the student, who may be more amenable to the pressure of failure to graduate than the teachers have been to the pressure of withholding funds.

According to Pipho (1978), 33 states have set some sort of minimum competency standards, either by legislation or by state superintendents. Such standards are being considered in at least 10 other states. Wisconsin is not one of them. In announcing the results of the Blue Ribbon Commission on Competency Based Education, State Superintendent Barbara Thompson announced that local school districts were encouraged to utilize mastery testing, but that the

setting of minimum competency standards either for graduation or for promotion was left to the discretion of local districts. She argued that Wisconsin's reading legislation, Chapter 29 Section 118.015, goes farther toward assuring quality reading instruction. Governor Schreiber supported this position in a speech made in January of 1978.

Milwaukee and Sparta have set minimum competency standards for high school graduation; and Manitowoc, Kenosha, Eau Claire, and Green Bay are among the cities which have such standards under study. A high school committee in Madison recently has come out in opposition to minimum competency standards, though it supported testing in the eighth grade for diagnostic purposes.

The battlefield for reading teachers, as well as all of the other curricular areas for the next few years may well be in the state and federal legislatures and the state departments of education, rather than in the halls of academe. The questions of how much phonics, or which hierarchy will seem trivial in comparison to the question of who controls what will be taught in reading, the teacher or the state? And teachers will not long be able to close their doors and teach when records and state mandated tests show that they are not following the guidelines. This will be especially true where, as in Washington D.C., their pay is dependent on their students' achievement on those tests. Nor will university professors long be free to educate prospective teachers in the best way they know how when they know that their students will have to follow state guidelines and be able to teach to the tests. Accountability is a double-edged sword, able to promise real improvement in the education of all students, while hindering the teachers and programs that are trying to provide that improvement.

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RESOURCES FOR TEACHERS:

Survival Skills Materials

by
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There is little doubt that to be of maximum utility, survival skills materials should approximate real world materials and activities. For this reason, it is highly recommended that whenever possible the actual forms from business, industry and the community should be used for instruction and application. Since it is not always feasible to obtain these materials, the following list of commercially-prepared materials is presented. The reading levels indicated are those recommended by the publishers.

Publisher	Title	Reading Level
Associated Press	Newspaper Reading Skills	4 to 8
Avalon Hill Games	Outdoor Survival	4 to 8
Cambridge	Reading for Survival Series	
	Reading for Life	1
	Reading for Progress	2
	Reading for Results	3
	Reading Competence	4 to 5
	Reading Improvement	5 to 6
	Reading Performance	6 to 7
	Reading Achievement	7 to 8
	We The People Read Newspapers--English or Spanish	

Publisher	Title	Reading Level
Follett Publishing Company	Career Guidance Series	
	Wanting a Job	
	Training for a Job	
	Starting a Job	
	Looking for a Job	
	Holding a Job	
	Changing a Job	
	Coping Skills Series	
	Finding Work	
	Getting Medical Assistance	
	Budgeting	
	Using Community Resources	
Globe (Learning Trends)	Life Skills Books	
	Forms In Your Future	
	You The Buyer (Available Fall, 1978)	
	Going Out/Getting Ahead (Available Fall, 1978)	
Ideal 1100 S. Lavergne Oak Lawn, IL 60453	How Do I Fill Out A Form? (Ditto Masters)	
Little Kenny Publications The Learning Shop Milwaukee, WI 53217	Common Survival Skills	
	Telephone and Refer. Skills	
	Retail Buying	
	Finding a Job	
	Map Reading	
	Installment Buying	
	Graph Reading	
	Sports	
	Stocks & Investments	
New Readers Press Box 131 Syracuse, NY 13210	Developing Coping Skills	
	Let's Look It Up	
	Your Personal Business	
	Telephone and Telegraph	
	Letters and Announcements	

Publisher	Title	Reading Level
New Readers Press	Practice In Survival Reading Series	
	Everyday Reading and Writing	
	Signs Around Town	
	Label Talk	
	Read The Instructions First	
	Studying For A Driver's License	
Random House 400 Hahn Road Westminster, MD 21157	Scoring High In Survival Reading	
	Earning and Spending	
	Taking Action	
Relevant Productions	Consumerism Series	
	Buying A Used Car	
	Reading Ads	
	Consumerism	
	Comparative Shopping	
	Consumer Laws	
	Consumer Fraud	
	Personal Money Series	
	Financing A Car	
	How To Handle Money	
	Interest	
	Consumer and Metrics	
	Nutrition	
	Establishing Credit	
	Work Series	
	How To Get And Hold A Job	
	I Can Get A Job	
	What You Should Know About Insurance	
	Self Concept and Work	
	Earning Money Now	
	First Weeks of Work	
	The Interview	
	People Series	
	Making and Keeping Friends	
	How To Read A Map	
	Reaching The Age Of Responsibility	
	You Can Succeed	
	Making Decisions	

Publisher	Title	Reading Level
Relevant Publications (cont.)	Life Style 70's	
	Finding A Job	
	Preparing For Work	
	My Legal Rights	
	Decision Making	
	Buyer's Rights	
	How Do You Learn?	
	Gaining Friends	
	Money	
	Marriage	
	On Your Own	
	Getting Credit	
	The Comparative Shopper	
	Building Self-Concepts	
	Ads Talk	
Richards Publish. Company P.O. Box 25395 Milwaukee, WI 53225	Meeting Basic Competencies in Reading (A Workbook)	
Scholastic Books 904 Sylvan Ave. Englewood Cliffs, NJ 07632	Real Life Reading Skills Program	9 to 12
Science Research Associates	The Job Ahead	
	Level 1	2 to 3
	Level 2	3 to 4
	Level 3	5 to 6
Steck Vaughn 807 Brazas P.O. Box 2028 Austin, TX 78768	Social Education Series	
	Where Does The Money Go?	3 to 4
	It's Your Money Bk. 1	6 to 8
	It's Your Money Bk. 2	6 to 8
	How To Get A Job And Keep It, Rev.	5 to 6

PROFESSIONAL MATERIALS ON REVIEW

Johns, Jerry L. Basic Reading Inventory. Dubuque, Iowa: Kendall Hunt Publishing Company, 1978.

Reviewed by
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The informal reading inventory (IRI) certainly is not a recent innovation in reading instruction. The market has been filled with books and articles telling teachers how to develop, administer, interpret, and evaluate IRI's. Basic Reading Inventory is another addition to this field.

Intended for "students in preservice education, teachers taking introductory and advanced reading courses, reading specialists, learning disability teachers, and school systems desiring to offer in-service work in reading diagnosis," this 136-page, soft-cover book is designed to present one procedure which can be used for placing pupils in appropriate reading materials from Pre-primer to Grade Eight, for evaluating reading performance, and for developing strategies for reading lessons. In addition to the introduction which briefly explains the purpose of the inventory and possible methods for administering and evaluating it, the book contains graded word lists and graded paragraphs, test forms and record forms which may be copied and duplicated, an annotated bibliography of selected sources related to IRI's, sample reading strategy lessons, and aids for analyzing and summarizing test results. As is fairly typical for IRI's, the materials contain no pictures or drawings which could either aid the child's understanding of what he is reading or distract from it.

Recognizing that this selection could be and has been questioned by some reading experts, the

author, nevertheless, chose to use Betts's definitions and descriptions of the independent, instructional, and frustration reading levels. He has also added information about and procedures for helping a teacher to determine the pupil's capacity level.

While teachers will probably find little new concerning IRI's in Basic Reading Inventory, they could find it a valuable addition to their professional library. Not only is the book useable for their classrooms, but it also gives a short summary of what has been stated about IRI's. This reviewer found particularly refreshing the author's viewpoint concerning the teacher. While most authors expect that teachers will use their good common sense and professional expertise in applying theories and strategies, they not always state this succinctly. In Basic Reading Inventory Jerry Johns supports his view that the teacher is what makes the difference by time and again pointing out that the teacher must interpret results in terms of good common sense and knowledge of the pupils. The teacher who does this will accept or reject the test results, modify the follow-up to fit the situation, and thus make Basic Reading Inventory one of many meaningful tools to be used in the classroom.

Cleary, Donna McKee. Thinking Thursdays: Language Arts in the Reading Lab. Newark, DE: International Reading Association, 1978. (87 pages)

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In a casual, almost folksy style, the author relates her experiences in starting a reading lab for a group of secondary school students, ranging from motivated to reluctant. After a few introductory remarks in which the author establishes the situation and setting, the book contains a description of 20 activities Ms. Cleary used to motivate her students and to help them become better prepared for school and for life. It is these descriptions which make the book useful for reading teachers,

especially those who work in secondary school reading labs.

For the reviewer to reveal why the author chose the specific title for this publication would be similar to telling who the murderer was in a whodunit mystery. The interested person will have to read the book to find the reasons for the author's clever choice.

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Harper, Robert J. and Kilarr Gary, eds. Reading and the Law. Newark, Delaware: IRA/ERIC, 1978 (146 pages).

Will minimal literacy standards for graduation and funding turn into maximum standards? What kind of reading will the law prescribe? Are the basic assumptions that underlie the present relationship between law and reading accurate?

Reading and the Law raises these and other provocative questions in order to provide information and to encourage the awareness of a very complex problem--that posed by the relationship between law and reading.

From "Courts and Public Education," by Edward J. Schork and Stephen C. Miller, which describes the origins of judicial activism in education to "Does Society Really Know How It Reads?" by Harper and Kilarr, this is a publication that could help shape the destiny of American literacy in the next decade.

PARENTS' SPOT:

A Child AND His Language Go To School

by

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Parents know that learning proceeds at a phenomenal rate during the first years of a child's life. Physical, psychological and social skills, gathered in informal settings prepare the child for the formal education our society values so highly. We want to provide intellectually stimulating experiences that will promote normal growth and development of skills and abilities often classified as school "readiness" skills. How many parents are aware that a child's ability to communicate verbally is one of the most important skills that emerges during the period of early childhood?

We know that children who have developed a large vocabulary and who understand and use a variety of sentence patterns have an advantage over their less verbal classmates. This is to be expected in our society where instruction relies on spoken or written language. Many educators believe that a child's competency in language may have a great effect on his success in one of the most basic school tasks--learning to read. Parents can do a great deal to encourage their child's language development; the result could be a more successful school experience for the child. This article will skim the highlights of emerging language and then present some activities that encourage growth in language skill.

The growth and development of language is a fascinating topic to explore. Initially, infants use cries, gurgles and coos to communicate with those who take care of them. Parents can usually understand what their baby needs by interpreting these pre-verbal

attempts. Some feel that early interactions between the child and parent initiate language learning although the developmental process remains at a passive level for several months (e.g., the child hears language but does not actively use language). At about three months of age the child begins to babble and, interestingly, his babbling includes sounds used in languages the world over. In other words, a baby born to English speaking parents will babble in sounds common to the Chinese, German and Russian languages! Slowly, the foreign sounds drop out of the child's repertoire resulting, perhaps, from constant exposure to culturally unique language sounds. Again, environmental reinforcement appears to play an important role in language development. As the child approaches his or her first birthday, words begin to take on meaning and we find the youngster responding to verbal commands such as "get the ball" or "come to Mommy". The child may not use words spontaneously but begins to mimic words modeled by his parents. These characteristics suggest that the child is approaching a crucial plateau where meaning is attached to verbal symbols. At this point, the lifelong process of active language acquisition begins.

At about twelve months of age the first real words begin to appear. These words, termed "holophrases", are capable of relaying meanings which almost approach the sentence in communication value. Combined with variations in intonation, the child can express his needs quite adequately to those who know him well. For example, the holophrase TRUCK combined with situational clues, gestures and appropriate intonation, can easily be interpreted by the parent to mean:

"I dropped my truck."
"Get my truck for me."
"See the truck outside."
"I hear the sound of a truck."
"I'm afraid of the truck."

Next, the child begins to use two and three words together; these "telephrases" seem to retain the words most necessary for communication and are very similar to messages adults record on telegrams:

"Timmy drink." (Timmy wants a drink.)
"Allgone juice." (I have finished my juice.)
Lisa shoe off." (Lisa has taken her shoe off.)

The word order of these early sentences closely resembles that of the adult language a child hears. Linguists (language scholars) believe that the child can accomplish this feat because he or she is subconsciously internalizing an intricate system of rules that is thought to form the basis of our language. These rules help us to formulate grammatically correct sentences and discourage incorrect forms. For example, we would not say:

Larry chair the sat on. (Incorrect word order)

Take those mittens off Christopher hands. (Deletion of possessive "s" to signify the plural)

As the child increases his vocabulary and simultaneously learns rules to join words together in phrases, language skills will increase.

Rapidly, the child begins to develop the common sentence patterns used in his environment. However, the early sentences will not be an exact copy of the adult form of language. Negative sentence forms (I do <u>not</u> want my ball) emerge early; the first sentences of this type may incorporate the word NO into a familiar telephrase:

"No want bike." (I don't want my bike.)

"No play car." (You may not play with my car.)

As more rules are learned, language is perfected and the child is able to use many forms of our English negative sentences. Interrogative sentences first appear as holophrases or telephrases accompanied by a rise in intonation:

"Milk?" (May I have some milk?)

"Daddy bye-bye?" (Are you going away, Daddy?)

Like the negative sentence, these interrogative patterns expand in a predictable manner until the numerous adult language forms are mastered. At the same time additional formal sentence patterns emerge and develop. Slowly, grammatically complete sentences replace the immature patterns we hear young children use.

Within four or five years normal youngsters master much of the intricate grammatical system of our language. Recently, we have found that many children are not able to understand or use some of the more complex sentence patterns until middle childhood. Of course, vocabulary growth is a lifetime endeavor. New words and new meanings for old words are added to our vocabulary continuously.

Many valuable insights have been gathered from studying the emergence of language in children. One of the most important things we have learned is that all children appear to learn their language according to a very predictable sequence; however, children pass through that learning sequence at a very individual rate. So, just as children differ in height, weight and hair color, they also exhibit a variety of levels of language skill. While one child may use mature sentence patterns by age four, another child may still be discovering some of the basic language rules at the age of seven. As mentioned earlier, children vary greatly in their knowledge of word meanings. The point is that children enter the primary school with a very personal level of language ability. This implies that some children can understand and use a greater number of words and more complex sentences than can their less able classmates.

Common sense tells us that a child with limited skill in language may find the elementary school classroom very frustrating. Although certain language may have been quite adequate for communication in the intimate family or play group situation, the child may have difficulty responding to the vocabulary or sentence forms used by teachers as they administer instructional programs. We know, for example, that some children are confused by terms commonly used by kindergarten or first grade teachers as they introduce beginning reading lessons:

"Find the first word."
"Listen for the beginning sound."
"Underline the letter."

In each area of the school's curriculum, the oral language skill a child has acquired forms the base from which learning evolves.

Since language ability is important for success in school we want to give the child every possible opportunity to learn language and to use it. Our teacher training programs try to help teachers become aware of linguistic differences and encourage them to make a special effort to provide for individualization in the classroom. But parents can do many things to promote normal language growth in their child, and thus, help to eliminate problems that result from a mismatch between the child's language and that of the classroom environment. The responsibility begins when the child is still an infant.

Think about the brief overview that dealt with the sequential development of language. Before the child can walk he or she is beginning to respond to language. While little can be done to enhance the native ability to learn, a great deal can be done to create an environment conducive to language learning. Efforts to promote language can and should begin at an early age. We do not know how children acquire competency in language; therefore we are unable to develop a prescriptive program that will insure an increase in a child's language ability. But we do know that children need continuous exposure to natural language in order to gather the information they will need to build a grammatical system. The more opportunities a child has to expand experiences, the greater his chances to increase his vocabulary. The next section will offer some suggestions that have seemed to encourage language development in my own young son. Perhaps other parents will try a few of these ideas and then use their imagination to turn many daily activities into language experiences for children.

The Infant

During the first year of a child's life he begins to internalize our sound system, practice several of the sounds he will need to make words and attach meaning to words, phrases and sentences. It is so important to surround the young child with language at every possible opportunity. These activities may prove to be enjoyable:

1. Singing at feedings and before naptime; at times it is fun to insert the child's name into nursery songs

2. Using rhymes, jingles, verses, etc. whenever they fit them into routine care schedules:
   -"This Little Pig Went to Market" while putting on shoes and stockings
   -"Rub-a-Dub-Dub" at bathtime
   -"One Little Indian Boy" as finger and toe nails are clipped
   (Children love the repetition of the unusual words and phrases.)

3. Play with the many toy-books that are on the market; the child can locate familiar objects named by the parent or engage in simple activities suggested by many of the books (Pat the Bunny by Dorothy Kunhardt was one of our favorites.).

4. Talk to the baby whenever he is nearby even if it means reviewing a menu planned for the evening meal (during carriage outings, our baby responded with delightful babbling when his student-mommy recited a difficult concept that had been studied while he napped)

These and other verbal activities you can discover promote a healthy social-emotional relationship as well as a rich language environment. Best of all, they place minimal demands on a busy parent's time schedule!

The Toddler

Growth and development of language ability proceeds rapidly during the toddler stage which extends until approximately age three. Children acquire a large number of words and many of the common sentence patterns appear in immature form. The toddler's language delights his family as new words accumulate daily and experiments with the emerging rule system produce comical utterances. This is a prime time for exposure to meaningful language and there are endless opportunities that invite the parent to converse with the child:

1. Encourage the child to name toys as he deposits them into the toybox

2. Engage in play activities that build language and thinking skills such as having the child find "a huge red ball--a tiny green ball" or the "two cowboy 'people' with yellow hats"

3. Page through magazines and discuss pictures of familiar objects

4. Share beautifully illustrated picture books, nursery rhyme and poetry selections daily (wordless picture books were especially fun to use with my son at about age two since we could create stories; a favorite was Dog by Ellis Simmons because the story related directly to our family)

5. Collect and read the pocket-size "intimate" books that fit so well into tiny hands (The Nutshell Library by Marice Sendak is a good place to start)

6. Extend the child's telegraphic speech by providing a meaningful response; natural conversation is more beneficial than simply expanding the utterance to a grammatically complete sentence

7. Casually teach simple concepts and introduce new words as opportunities arise when traveling, walking, baking, cleaning, raking leaves, etc.

8. Make or buy simple puppets and act out favorite stories, rhymes or activities the child enjoys (be sure the child participates in the activity)

9. Listen to the child and include him in family conversations (our family has developed a policy of "taking turns" at the dinner table in order to permit short segments of adult conversation as well as a chance for the child to talk)

Direct communication between the young child and his or her parents is very important. As children's cognitive capacity increases they will acquire grammatical rules and new vocabulary terms that will allow them to elaborate telegraphic utterances. They need to hear language being used in a way that is meaningful. It is important to emphasize that "language teaching" is not advocated. The examples offered are meant to motivate the parent to use every possible opportunity to expose the child to natural language and to encourage the child's linguistic attempts. Children who have frequent and meaningful verbal communication with family members will certainly reap linguistic advantage. Daily language experiences provide a model for children to study.

The Preschool Child

A majority of the basic sentence patterns in our language have emerged and are well-developed by the end of the pre-school era. For the normally developing child, vocabulary growth occurs daily but the number of words used orally remains much lower than the number recognized aurally. Growth in word count and the ability to understand and use complex sentences increases the child's skill in language. So much is happening in the pre-school child's life as experiences broaden, interests expand and the need

to communicate with members of his or her peer group becomes apparent. During these years language becomes important not only for meeting basic needs and enjoyment, but also for interpersonal communication with members outside the family group and for learning about the world. Ideas for providing a rich language environment are unlimited:

1. Use daily chores as a means for building skill in following directions in a sequence such as: pick up the blocks, wash your hands and then find a cookie

2. Memorized nursery rhymes and songs are ideal for encouraging spontaneous, creative play; take turns reciting alternate lines of a favorite rhyme, substitute words in a song or rhyme to create humor (the toddler would not have tolerated such word play but most preschoolers find this to be a fun activity)

3. Select and share some good musical and story records that are paired with related picture books (some libraries stock these selections in the children's section)

4. Learn some of the child's favorite fairy tales and tell rather than read the stories to your child; provide a chance for the child to tell parts of the story, to invent his own creative characters or new endings for the stories and to dramatize all or a portion of the story

5. Everyday excursions provide a wealth of first-hand experiences that will expand a child's oral vocabulary if the parent is alert to the possibilities: (A Trip to the Allergist--skin test, reaction, allergic, allergist, chest x-ray, blood test; Going with Dad to the Body Shop--dent, repair, wrecker, fender, tow-truck, towed). By including the child in discussions he is able to learn and retain new vocabulary.

6. Carefully screen the child's television viewing so that stimulating programs are viewed but not to the exclusion of other activities that will promote cognitive and language growth

7. Read at least one selection daily from the many outstanding children's books that are available at the public library or in inexpensive paperback form; learn to recognize the popular authors of children's books and the titles that have become award winners--the following list can be used as a place to begin:

Make Way for Ducklings by Robert McClosky (Viking, 1941)
The Snowy Day by Ezra Jack Keats (Macmillan, 1974)
Mike Mulligan and His Steam Shovel by Virginia Lee Burton (Houghton Mifflin, 1943)
The Tale of Peter Rabbit by Beatrix Potter (Warne, 1902)
Where the Wild Things Are by Maurice Sendak (Harper & Row, 1963)
Millions of Cats by Wanda Gag (Coward-McCann, 1928)
The Little House by Virginia Lee Burton Houghton Mifflin, 1942)
The Tall Book of Mother Goose by Feodor Rojankovsky (Harper & Row, 1942)
A is for Annabelle by Tasha Tudor (Walck, 1954)
Brian Wildsmith's 1, 2, 3's by Brian Woldsmith (F. Watts, 1965)
A Boy, A Dog and a Frog by Mercer Mayer (Dial, 1967)
Swimmy, by Leo Lionni (Pantheon, 1963)
Corderoy by Don Freeman (Viking, 1968)
The Story of Ferdinand by Munro Leaf (Viking, 1936)
Curious George by Hans Augusto Ray (Houghton Mifflin, 1941)
Caps for Sale by Esphyr Slobodkina (W. R. Scott, 1947)
William's Doll by Charlotte Zolotow (Harper & Row, 1972)
A Tree is Nice by Janice May Udry (Harper & Row, 1956)
Timothy Turtle by Al Graham (Welch, 1946)
Madeline's Rescue by Ludwig Bemelmans

The few examples listed are meant to serve as a springboard for the many possibilities that exist for providing a good oral language environment for the young child. As mentioned earlier, a strong oral language base is essential for success in school.

Language skill which emerges through listening and speaking must be extended to include reading and writing. Traditionally, the latter skills were taught by the first grade teacher; however, many parents report that their preschoolers show an interest in reading and writing. Although no one would advocate putting pressures on the young child, it seems unfair to discourage a child's desire to learn. Parents can use several pre-reading activities to help their interested preschooler:

1. Print names of family members and let the child copy them onto place cards, birthday and holiday cards

2. Help him form words with magnetic letters that accompany many commercial games

3. Attach labels to furniture, appliances, toys, toothbrush holder, etc., by printing the name of an item on a small notecard and attaching it on or above the item

4. Praise the child's attempts to "read" words printed on canned goods, billboards, road signs, familiar book titles

5. Allow him to print simple grocery lists by copying labels of needed items onto a tablet

6. Have the child locate letters or words that are repeated in any written material you use with him (storybooks, magazines, newspaper captions)

7. Label the child's artwork before you display it; soon he will expect or even demand words or a phrase to be attached to his project

8. Begin having the child compose letters to grandparents or friends as soon as an interest develops (our early letters were line drawings, then labelled pictures, and at age three, they have become dictated letters that were reread to insure "correct words" were printed.) For example, this letter was dictated at age three: Dear Grandma, Grandma's house is yellow and black. A doorbell makes the garage door go up. It comes down, too. A babysitter was there.

Ruth. They have balls and sticks (pool table) and I ate ice cream. That's all. Love, Timmy.

9. Play any creative games that encourage reading and writing (at a visit to Auntie's, two three-year-old cousins dictated and then watched as "Susie Waitress" printed out their individual lunch orders; the activity has continued and several common "food words" are being reinforced in written form)

In conclusion, most children develop enough language to get along just fine in the family setting. But children who develop fluency in language (acquire a broad, varied vocabulary; use clear, concise and complex sentence forms) have a head start and are sure to experience greater success during their early years in school. The best ways to help a child take very little extra time. Most of the ideas presented take advantage of normal, daily activities and expand them to include attention to helping the child build skill in understanding and using language. Some preschool children are ready to expand their language skill to include reading and writing. Although these children should be given every chance to discover how to read and write, there should be no parental pressures to learn.

Author's Note: The interested reader is referred to Phillip S. Dale's book, Language Development: Structure and Function, published by Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1976. This paperback provides a well written introduction to child language acquisition.